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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 000590

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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION CONTINUES PROTESTS WITH NATION-WIDE
MARCH TO DHAKA

Classified By: A/POLECON COUNSELOR David Renz; reason: 1.4 (d)

1.(SBU) On February 2, the 14 party opposition alliance, led by the Awami League (AL), will start a "Long March" to Dhaka as part of their campaign to force the BNP led government to accept opposition proposed reforms to ensure a fairer election. The "Long March" is the culmination of a two month campaign which started back on November 22.

2. (C) Starting in 13 points throughout the country, the marchers plan to use different modes of transport and stop mid-way to Dhaka on February 4 to hold increasingly larger rallies. They expect to enter Dhaka in processions on February 5 to converge on Paltan Maidan, a huge parade and rally site in downtown Dhaka. AL Joint Secretary General Mukul Bose told poloff that they expect to gather momentum as they travel toward Dhaka, shouting, "Cholo, Cholo, Dhaka, Cholo," (Let's all go to Dhaka), and said that by the time they reach Dhaka there will be 1.5 to 2 million participants.

3. (C) Media reported that AL leader Shiekh Hasina expects the BNP led government to attempt to stop the long march and the final rally by mass arrests of AL activists. AL supporters told poloff that if the government reacts sharply during the march, they plan to "sit down" and prevent the movement of traffic. They said that country-wide strikes aimed at paralyzing the country may follow if the government uses violence on the peaceful marchers. "Our target would be the industries," Bose said, adding that the strikes could last all week.

4. (C) Asked how this campaign would be different than other less widely observed political actions, Bose said that this time top AL leaders would lead from the front lines. Upon arriving in Dhaka the leaders would direct marchers throughout Dhaka instead of from centralized points, he said, and added that "the 14 party alliance leaders will be with us as well."
CHAMMAS